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CHRISTMAS in CORN- WALL 60 YEARS AGO

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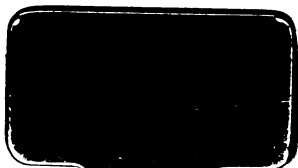
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Christmas in Cornwall
Sixty Years Ago

BY THE SAME AUTHOR:

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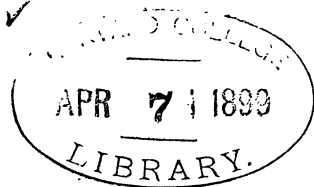
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Christmas in Cornwall 60 Years Ago
By Mrs. J. Bonham

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Fine Money

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Mrs. Olliver's Tea-party

CHAPTER ONE.

"WELL, I spoose, faather," said Mrs. Olliver in a quiet persuasive tone, as she rose and put aside her knitting for the night, "we mus' maake aw bit of a Christmas tay party, far ef our maidens do go out drinken' tay we mus' 'spec to ax aw few back agen. Es awnly wance a 'ear that wan 'ave got to maake aw bit of aw right out, an' I doon't think that es extravagont."

"Es nawthen' but vanity an' vexaation of speret, as the prophet said," replied her husband tartly.

"Well, faather, p'r'aps he never 'ad no cheldurn of es awn, ar else he wedn't lev thom go nowheere; but I doon't b'lieve in shutter' up cheldurn like ol' nuns from 'ear's end to 'ear's end. Stidy cheldurn too like *they* are; b'zides we can affoord et; see what aw deery (dairy) we got, an' what 'eap aw money we maade of the frewt laast 'ear."

"Well iss," answered the niggardly old man, "but see what aw heap of butter and creüm

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aw'll taake to maake aw greüt jardon of caake far passell of 'ungry boys an maidens. I doon't b'lieve in waasten' or spendin' nawthen', but what we're foorced to. *I* do b'lieve in saaven' all we can gen aw rainy day."

"Do *I* ever waaste anything 'on?" asked his wife quickly. "Why, you wudn't be well off like you are ef *I* hadn't worked so. B'zides I doon't go on to you about your bit of tawbacaw. I do buy 'om far 'a every Saturday—thirteen-pence-appn'y every week *gone*, f'r all I caan't abide smawken misself, yet I do beer weth et, an' you do *knew* aw doon't do a bit of good. Ef Jenifer wasn't gone up bed, I'd make 'ar reck'n om up. I arn't good scholar 'nough myself, but I know aw wed be aw braa farchen in aw few 'ears, iss fie!"

"Well," he replied, looking somewhat crest-fallen, "you caant say I'm extravagont weth my tawbaccaw, far you're never willen' far me to give way a bit to anybody else."

"No, no," she answered very decidedly, "es no good far 'a to think I'm goo'en' to lev noberry else smawk in this 'ouse; wan pipe do moost stuffle me."

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Mr. Olliver had smoked a little before his marriage, though he kept it a secret. When they became man and wife and the pipe came out, a compromise was made that in consideration of Mrs. Olliver taking submissively to this objectionable habit in her husband, he should never ask others to smoke in the home.

But let us have a little gossip over our friends. Farmer Olliver was known to be a man "with a braa deep bag" (purse), but he was also very "neary." If any one outside his own little chapel, of which he was a member, asked for a trifle to help some unfortunate or bereaved family his subterfuge would always be, "Well, I doon't see I can afford et, 'cause we got our own little chapel to support." It was very little indeed that the chapel got from him, though. Yet money was plentiful, and every year a good sum was put into the bank.

Farmer Olliver had married late in life, and was many years older than his wife. He had been brought up in an even, humdrum sort of way, keeping little company and rarely going further than Stoney, five miles away; and after his marriage he had always clung to these early formed habits. Mrs. Olliver, on

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the contrary, was a sociable woman and enjoyed having a friend to see her, though there was usually a battle of words over it. She was a healthy, cheerful-looking woman, an excellent manager, economical but never niggardly, and her house was a picture of cleanliness.

Jenifer, the eldest daughter, was like her mother, very cheerful, and rather good-looking, with nice dark eyes and good teeth. She wore her hair in natural curls, that hung down her back, except when at her household work.

Caroline, the second girl, was a striking contrast—so retiring and quiet. Her thoughtful face was relieved from dulness by the pleasant look of her mouth. When she even smiled the whole features were transformed in a moment, and she really looked fascinating. A pair of blue eyes added to her other charms. She eagerly read every book she could get hold of, but that was not saying much, as few found their way to Squellers, and her very limited education had been obtained only at the village dame school; so that the Bible was her chief study, and with that she was most familiar.

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There were three other children, Henry, the eldest, being now eleven. His father already had his eye on him, and he would shortly be leaving school.

"Books an' larnen'," said the farmer, "es all very well for the gentry, but not for boys like mine ef they do mean to git on an' put by somefen agen aw rainy day."

We were saying that Mr. Olliver was a "member of society," and so was his wife—their names were on Caleb Rowe's class-book. Mrs. Olliver really made an effort to get to "class meeting," and read her Bible on Sundays while watching the milk on the brandise; but we fear her knowledge of the Scriptures historically was lamentably small, or she would have been only too glad to enlighten her husband as to who was the author of the quotation he had so glibly uttered; and she would hardly have exposed her ignorance by being uncertain as to whether Solomon had any children or not.

Jenifer and Caroline were also "members," having been "brought in" two years previously during a revival in the village.

Squellers, the farm on which the Ollivers lived, was a compact homestead, with about

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eighty acres of rich land, besides runs for young bullocks and sheep. The old farmhouse lay in a charming valley, and from the windows, both front and back, stretched away as fair a landscape as one could look upon. It was a low thatched building, with a roomy porch also thatched, and almost hidden by honeysuckle during the summer. Hardy ferns also flourished on its roof, and homely sparrows were accommodated with lodgings free of charge. Some of the latticed windows were partially hidden by rose-bushes, others by sweet-scented jessamine. The dear old farmhouse! What a study for the painters who are beginning to throng the neighbourhood had it been standing now!

CHAPTER TWO.

THIS was the first Christmas that Jenifer and Caroline had been invited to the round of the parties. They were now looked upon as young women, for one was nineteen, and the other nearly eighteen, and both were well grown for their ages. They had already been to eight parties, all at farm-houses, for there were no other homes to which one could be invited. The farmers and their workmen made up the only two classes in the parish, and the latter had not as yet taken to giving parties. At the time Mrs. Olliver and her daughters first consulted together about having a party, the mother thought there would be stout opposition from her husband. When once the die was cast, however, or, in other words, when once she had "out with it," she would not let it trouble her much. She had informed him of what was coming off, and though he might be sulky, she must put up with that.

The morning following the little talk already

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mentioned, mother and daughters put their heads together as to which day would suit them, and whom they should ask. It was decided that Jenifer should ride round on horseback that afternoon, and give the invitations. So, early after dinner, she set out. There were six farms to call at, and she had to ride quickly from one to another, some being a mile or two apart. All went well, and every invitation was gladly accepted. The sisters in each case were to come in time for tea, their brothers were to follow later on.

The next day Mrs. Olliver began her preparations by making the white bread and saffron cakes. The party was on the following afternoon, and the other cakes and apple-pies would be baked then. Soon after dinner on that day, Jenifer, who longed to outshine all others in their spread, consulted with her mother about making some little cakes like those they had seen at the Vicarage tea.

"I'm moost 'fraid to venture," said Mrs. Olliver, "'cause we aant got no ob'n (oven) to baake little knick-knacks like they. I doon know how mutch fire aw'll taake far thom, saame my life."

"Law, mother, *you* can baake thom fast

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enough ef you'll *try*. I'll be gone an' maake thom, far the cook said to me how they was done."

So the butter and flour were mixed, and the eggs, sugar, and cream added. The hot baking-iron was well wiped and greased, and bits of the rich mixture dropped on it. Then all was covered with the baker, and Mrs. Olliver began, not without misgivings, to "blast" the precious little cakes.

"I'm all of aw tremble," she said, "far I no moore know how much fire aw'll taake to baake thom than the dead in the grave." Jenifer watched her mother eagerly. "Es that enough, I wonder?" she asked, carefully placing another blazing bush of furze on the baker.

"Why no," replied Jenifer, "that'll never sawk (soak) thom; put bit moore fire, mawther."

Another bush was added. "Theere, theere," said Mrs. Olliver quickly, "I'm 'fraid of my life to put any more, ar they may be burnt to rags."

After about twenty minutes they thought it might be well just to have a peep at them. The hot ashes were brushed aside, and Jenifer

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was to look under while her mother partly lifted the baker. Suddenly the poor girl uttered a bitter yell. "O-o-oh! my goodness guide me! they are all so black as aw cawl (coal)."

Mrs. Olliver in her fright let the baker drop down suddenly. "Never, to be sure," she cried in great distress.

"Iss they are," replied Jenifer, ready to burst out crying. The baker was lifted off with trembling hands, when a round, black, charred mass met their eyes. So ended the little cakes, so rich and on which they had bestowed much thought and labour; and thus was foiled a presumptuous attack on the supremacy of "the Vicarage Tea."

Caroline was upstairs making that part of the house in perfect order for the visitors, and she was called to sympathise with the sorrowing ones. But there was no time to be lost, for other matters claimed their attention. "Little cakes," however, must not be thought of again. Mrs. Olliver, of course, inwardly bewailed the wasted butter and eggs and sugar and cream, but seeing how cut up her daughter was, wisely said nothing. Soon the apples were made, and baked to a "T." by Mrs.

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Olliver, who could turn out anything to perfection in her own line of baking. As she said herself, when after some days the keenness of the disappointment had rubbed off, "I doon knaw nawthen' 'bout sush fiddle-faddles. We mus' stick to the good ol'-fashen' fare of saffern and heavy cake, and good apple-pie and creüm."

The time wasted over the little cakes had interfered with the progress of the preparations. The strangers were expected before five o'clock, and it was now after three, and still the heavy cakes were not made. Caroline, good creature that she was, having finished her share of the preparations, now worked with real goodwill to help her sister forward, cutting bread-and-butter, assisting in laying the table, also urging her sister to "get changed," that she might be ready to receive the visitors.

Mrs. Olliver brought out her rare old china that had belonged to her grandmother. The teapot was very large and almost square in shape, and the fiddle-pattern silver spoons shone brilliantly. The table looked well, and though Jenifer still mourned the absence of the little cakes that would have marked their

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spread as something extraordinary, yet consoled herself with the thought that everything was of the best quality. Milking the cows could not be thought of on such an occasion ; so Martha Trezise, who often came to help for an hour or so, was to undertake that for them.

Jenifer in her own anxiety, this being the first young people's party, had not yet seen the way clear to get upstairs to change. This thing worried her, then the other, so that the poor girl was in quite a state of nervous irritability. The three children now arrived from the village school much earlier than usual, for, having found out they were going to have a "tay" party, they set off for home at full speed, and came rushing in "like wild things," and immediately planted themselves in the parlour door, lost in wonder at the table and the coal fire—a thing they rarely saw. Jenifer nearly upset a plate of bread-and-butter when they turned round quickly to see who was coming. This was the last straw to break the camel's back. She forgot herself for once, and vented her pent-up feelings on the innocent children. "Get along weth 'a all this minute," she cried spitefully, at

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the same time giving them a rough push, "or I'll scat 'a maslin.—Mawther," she called out, "the cheldurn shaan't come in glazing 'bout the parlour, they nearly maade me arverset the things. They aarn't goon' t'ave tay weth we; they must wait an' 'ave et weth faather."

"Iss, iss, cheldurn, you mus'n't 'ender the maidens," called out Mrs. Olliver, with red face and blearing eyes from blasting the heavy cakes. So the three longing, curious children—banished to the kitchen—had to content themselves with a taste of cake till they had their tea with father, for none could induce him to join the strangers.

Jenifer made a hasty toilet, her heart beating violently for fear a knock should come before she was ready, and mother might answer the door in her *déshabille*. Caroline, too, was not fit to receive company as yet, as she was still busy in the dairy. Poor girls, both busily at work since early morning, what a day they had had !

CHAPTER THREE.

JENIFER had barely reached the foot of the stairs, hot and flurried, when the first knock came, and Hester Ann and Mary Elizabeth Shephard were admitted. Caroline now ran downstairs, having hastily changed, to allow her mother a chance of getting herself ready. The smoking hot heavy cakes were already baked, and were being kept warm for tea. Mrs. Olliver was soon down again, very becomingly dressed in a brown stuff gown and white net cap. Caroline stepped in to speak to the Shepheards, followed by Mrs. Olliver, who welcomed the young girls very cordially.

Knock after knock was now heard from the different arrivals, and presently the parlour was looking pretty well filled up. There were the Shepheards, Jane and Alice Bartlett, Susan Dale, Mary Ann Thomas, and her cousin Elizabeth Hendy, and the three Bawdens, making ten, which with the Ollivers would be thirteen. All having now arrived,

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except Eunice Oxley, Caroline and her mother disappeared, returning after a time with four plates of delicious heavy cake, which with the abundant supply of saffron cake, two apple-pies, two large basins of cream, and the plates of white bread-and-butter, gave a substantial look to the table. Mrs. Olliver returned for a moment to the kitchen, gave strict injunctions to the children not to meddle with anything, carried in the urn, and proceeded to pour out the tea.

Everyone seemed delighted. Few of them had visited the house before, and the Ollivers did all they could to make their friends feel that they were welcome. "Doon't look far compliments" said Mrs. Olliver, her face red and beaming. "You are saw welcome as the flowers of May; maake aw good tay, far theere's plenty more caake an' things in the deery. I'd alles like to see everybody maaken' aw good tay."

And everybody did.

These guests were not the delicate pining young ladies so often met with in our crowded cities, some suffering from indigestion, others from loss of appetite. No, these young girls were pictures of health, with rosy cheeks and

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perfect digestion. Their lives were spent in the pure country air, their food was wholesome, and their habits simple. Moreover, they rose and retired early. What a colour they had as they sat round the table! Had their faces been truthfully transferred to canvas, some critic would, doubtless, have denounced the painting as being too highly coloured!

Tea finally came to an end, and mother and girls busied themselves in clearing the table. Then the former hastily set out tea in the kitchen for her husband, the children, the servant boys, and Martha, who had now finished milking.

Father was in a very decent humour, and made a good tea, thinking doubtless, now that the great "jardou" of cake was made, he might as well get his share. Mrs. Olliver and Martha washed up the china, leaving the girls free.

Not a young man had as yet put in an appearance. It was not the custom that they should arrive till seven or after. So the girls having no periodicals, piano, albums, or even interesting books to look at, fell back on the latest news in the parish, and on what So-and-

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So had new this winter, or on the way the "mantay-maker" had done their gowns. The Joselyns, too, were discussed, and as these young ladies had not long been living in Trethon, they were the subject of conversation for a considerable time. Everyone, of course, thought Nanny the better-looking of the two.

"I never seed noberry look so grand as she do," said Alice Bartlett, "but they say 'tes 'ar pretty figger that do shaw off 'ar things so. Put thom on aw little undersize maid an' she wud'n look much."

"How es et I wonder," asked Mary Ann Thomas, "that she es so to it weth all the boys?"

"I heerd" replied another, "that she got aw mine to aw young man, but 'ar faather doon like un."

"Who es 'aw' on?" asked Susan Dale.

"I no moore know than you. Mawther said she should like far thom to come down to-day, but she felt all backward like in asken' thom, been' strangers moost," said Jenifer. "They do say f'rall that they're fine nice maidens. The oldest wan es very sharp and quick, I've heerd," she continued, "an' there

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brother do think hisself somebody, but he's a good-looken' young man, an'——”

A knock was heard.

“Theere,” said one of the young girls who had been intently listening for this signal, for she was not much interested in the talk, “tha's wan of the boys come.”

Jenifer went into the passage, and opened the door. It was very dark.

“Good ebenen’,” came a voice out of the blackness.

“Who es et 'on?” she asked, peering out.

“No greüt stranger,” replied the invisible one.

“Law, 'Enery, es et 'on?” she exclaimed as a young man's figure came into the light. “How are 'a?”

“Middlen' thenky, an' how's yerself?” he asked, giving her a hearty hand-shake. After taking off and hanging up his hat he followed Jenifer to the parlour. Every sound was hushed among the eleven girls.

“Good ebenin' all,” said the bashful young man, seating himself on the first chair, and spreading his two large red hands on his knees. Hands that he had scrubbed to such a degree with sand and soda water till they

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looked the colour of scarlet carnations. His face was of the same hue, for that had also undergone a vigorous rubbing up with a rough flannel, and a rinsing in strong soapsuds, till, after polishing with the towel, it shone like Mrs. Olliver's copper warming-pan, in which she took so much pride. His hair had been well oiled—a custom they never neglected. This unenviable young farmer had no sister present who might address some words to him and set him somewhat at his ease. Susan Dale and he were on very good terms, but that young lady steadily kept her face averted, feeling that she blushed, and wishing to hide it. Jenifer had left the room, and the others were too shy to talk among themselves with the young man listening, so there was an awkward silence, during which Henry's face became peony colour, while his eyes were fixed earnestly on a sampler hanging on the opposite wall. Fortunately for him there was another knock, at which his heart leaped for joy. Jenifer soon entered, followed by two young farmers, with hands and faces of precisely the same hue as Henry's.

"Good ebenen' all," they cried out together, nodding to the girls and the bashful youth.

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"Well, 'Enry, my son, how are 'a?" asked one of them, seating himself by that young man's side, much to his delight. The other new arrival, not so self-possessed, sat on a chair behind the door where he could observe everyone. Henry and his friend were soon busily chatting in somewhat subdued tones. Groups of girls now also talked under their breath together, occasionally indulging in little peals of laughter.

"Find et muddy ded 'a 'on, Enry?" asked George Bartlett, looking at the former young man's boots.

"Iss, I was jest stagged gooen' through the ol' ploughed fiel! Aw! I am in a mess," he continued, looking down confusedly at his boots.

Another knock. Mrs. Olliver, passing, admitted these visitors, who proved to be William Shephard and Martin Thomas. Both on entering the parlour nodded to the others and sat down. Hester Shephard darted a glance towards her brother to satisfy herself that he had put on his best coat. The other young men were feeling more comfortable now, especially as Mrs. Olliver began asking after their mothers and other matters.

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"We expected Miss Oxley to tay," said their hostess, "but she dedn't come, an' 'ar brother was to come down far 'ar, but you know *she* doon't go 'bout mutch. 'E do taake moost all '*ar* time, an' 'ar brother's too far to read theer books."

Still another knocking: Jim Bawden had arrived, shy and nervous, and soon after Mr. Oxley himself, who entered the room with a quiet smile on his face.

CHAPTER FOUR.

A TALL, somewhat careworn-looking young man was Mr. Oxley, with an intelligent face, eyes dark but mild, and an easy, pleasant manner in speaking. What a contrast to the former arrivals! He was very far removed from them intellectually also. In fact, the Oxleys, their cleverness, and their books, were in every one's mouth. Scarce and dear as they were in those days, books lay here and there all over the house. They bought a large number, and borrowed many more. The grown-up sister, too, was quite a student, but longed for a teacher, for she and her brother were almost self-educated. John Oxley, some said, would "soon go cracky, ef ow dedn't give up larnen' so mutch." But given a chance, John Oxley would have been an honour to his country. He was pinioned down to the farm, when his thoughts were running in other channels; and time for study during some seasons of the year was very limited.

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After shaking hands with every one, he apologised for his sister's absence by saying that his mother had not been downstairs for the day, and Eunice could not be spared ; but he thought it best to come down and explain. The quiet unaffected talk of John Oxley soon put every one at ease, and girls began to look across the room and smile at young men with whom they were on specially good terms.

"Come ! come !" said Mrs. Olliver, who liked to see young people enjoying themselves, "arn't 'a gooen' to 'ave aw bit of a gaame, ar bit aw singen', ar somefen' 'on ? *You* can sing, caan't 'a, Maester Oxley ?" she asked, looking pleasantly at him.

"No, Mrs. Olliver, I don't sing much now."

"Say some verses 'on," said she, persuasively.

"Would you like a bit of Shakespeare?" he inquired, after a pause.

The simple woman had never heard the name before, and being at a loss to know what kind of a thing it meant, she adroitly turned it off by saying, "Well p'raps they'd raather 'ave few pons (pawns) first."

"Iss, iss, so we will," came from several.

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"And afterwards," said Caroline, who had an idea what a "bit of Shakespeare" meant, though she had never seen his works, "you'll say something, Mr. Oxley, please."

He nodded pleasantly at her. Caroline had heard him give a recitation at one of the parties, to her great delight. So now the old-time silly game of "forfeits" began—a favourite with almost everyone. Caroline and John joined in mechanically, though neither of them took any interest in it. John would have enjoyed a quiet talk on some book with Caroline, for though he had only met her once or twice during the Christmas season, he, from a few remarks of hers, was fully aware of her thirst for knowledge, and there was a bond of sympathy already between the two.

The game, however, proceeded with all haste, and presently came the redeeming of the pawns, accompanied by screams, scuffles, rushing about, and even kissing! How excited they became over it all! Even the bashful young man tore round the room, and clutched at the girls, muddy boots and all; but seeing that the floor was lime-ashed and sanded, he could not do any harm. Mrs.

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Olliver sat and shook with laughter, till great tears ran down her face. Mr. Olliver, on the kitchen chimney-bench taking a quiet whiff, wondered whatever possessed them down in the parlour, and shook his head solemnly.

The next game was blindman's buff, more noisy even than pawns. A scream louder than ever reached Mr. Olliver's ears. "Aw! dear me," he soliloquised, "'twas never sush things in *my* day. I caan't think whatever mawther can see in looken' 'pon aw passel aw boys an' maidens teeren' round after wan t'other like maaze things."

The poor man was evidently having a bad time of it. The next shout drew from him further mutterings, "Tes aw shaame far aw womon caallen' 'arself aw professor to lev sush things go on—no relidjon in such up-rooms!" But the happy folks in the parlour were unconscious of these senseless remarks, and played on at the popular old game till all were exhausted.

"I'm burnen' like fire," cried a girl breathlessly.

"So my too," gasped another. "I ben an tore my gownd. I 'itchn'd in the corner of the taable when I was teeren' round."

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"Well, lev es stop now," said Mrs. Olliver, "an' rest aw bit to cool down. Can wan of 'a sing aw curl (carol)?" she asked after a time, looking at the young men.

"*I will if you will,*" said George to Edward.

"Alright, what shall es 'ave?" asked Edward, who was in the choir.

"Lev es 'ave the great *Comfort ye*," cried one of the girls. This grand selection from the "Messiah" had only recently been attempted in the church, and to distinguish it from a simpler rendering sometimes given of the same words, they named it the *Great Comfort ye*, while the other was styled the *Little Comfort ye*.

So Edward started off; but on the fourth note he stopped short.

"Why, I thought you was all gooen' to 'elp me," he exclaimed, looking round.

"Sing on by yerself, Edward," said Mrs. Olliver. "I do dearly love to hear yer voice; then the others shall sing afterwards."

The young man rather nervously started again, fixing his eyes on a china jug with a man's face on it, an ornament on Mrs. Olliver's mantelshelf. Whether the smiling face of the man in the jug encouraged

Mrs. Olliver's Tea-party.

Edward or not, it is impossible to say, but certainly he went through the famous recitative very creditably, and every one was loud in extolling the performance, though doubtless Handel himself would have been more sparing in his praises had he made one of the party.

Some one now started *Angels from the Realms of Glory*. This joyous old hymn, with its trills and runs, was given in their best style, all acquitting themselves admirably. What fine voices most of them possessed! Their lungs were perfect. Hours of each day were spent in singing while at their work, and the fields rang with song while ploughing, sowing, or weeding went on. Father, during the singing, actually walked across the kitchen and listened at the door, but would not have been caught doing so on any account.

No sooner was the hymn finished than Caroline called out, "Now it is Mr. Oxley's turn," for she dreaded another game being proposed before he had a chance.

"Aw iss, Maester Oxley," said her mother, "*you* mus' do somefen' now."

"I shall be glad to give something if I thought you would like it."

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"Something from Shakespeare," exclaimed Caroline earnestly.

He rose quietly, and choosing a selection from *The Merchant of Venice*, began—

"The quality of mercy is not strained."

Mr. Oxley was a born reciter, and went through without a single slip or the least hesitancy. He avoided anything theatrical in his style, reserving parts requiring such treatment for private recitations in his bedroom. As he proceeded he became so wrapped up in his congenial task that he seemed unconscious of everything around him. His very face was lit up with something so attractive that every one gazed, and listened as if spellbound. Though it was little that some of these simple folks could take in of the sublime language, yet they were strangely moved at the intense earnestness of this intellectual young man, and when at last he finished amid breathless silence, every one was sorry it was over. Caroline had had a treat indeed, and was so lost to everything around her that while the others were expressing their delight in such words as, "Aw! what putty verses," or "However can 'a mind

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so much?" or "I never heerd nawthen' said to come up weth that," she could not utter a word.

Mr. Oxley saw how Caroline had been affected, and managed to get a seat near her. Some now clamoured for a new game, which fortunately for two, at least, took a long time to get into starting order.

"Well, Caroline, did you like the piece I chose?" asked John in a low voice.

"Oh, Mr. Oxley," she answered, "I never heerd anything like it in my life; I could 'ark to 'a all night. I wish you wud say another."

"But," he answered, "perhaps all the others don't feel like you."

"I suppose," said Caroline, in a dreamy sort of way, "you knaw a lot moore. How I shud like to be aable to say them like *you* do!"

"I have been learning parts of the book now for months," he answered. "I keep repeating them while I'm ploughing, or doing anything in the fields, or in the stables. I b'lieve our servant boys think I'm going out of my mind when they come upon me un-awares, and I am in the middle of one of my

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pieces, and reciting pretty loudly ; they stare like fitchers at me."

They both laughed at this. "Is it a dear book to buy?" asked Caroline somewhat timidly.

"You shall have mine for a few weeks," he said, "and I can learn something else."

"Caroline," whispered Mrs. Olliver coming over to them, "es ever so laate, help es get the supper." Their pleasant talk was over for that evening.

The table was pulled out by the young men, and the room restored to some order. Mrs. Olliver and the girls soon had the cloth on, and the plates of cake and apple-pie placed on it, and strange as it may seem to us in these days, bottles of spirits were brought forward as innocently as milk or coffee would be now. Finally the hot water and sugar appeared, and Mrs. Olliver asked the young men to mix for the girls. Some chose brandy—a "drop of smuggled" that Mr. Olliver had got on very easy terms, having "swopped" a few apples and a measure or two of wheat for it—others chose rum or shrub. Then the young men helped themselves. We must remind our readers that

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Total Abstinence had scarcely as yet been heard of in that or any other parish around.

The plates of cake and pie were passed, and most of the young men helped themselves freely, pressed good-naturedly by the generous hostess, who told them all to make a good supper, "far oll keep out the cawld."

Soon everyone was on the move. They were early folks in those days, and ten or half-past was considered fairly late. Father, vexed with himself and everyone else, had retired long since. Mrs. Olliver, motherly woman that she was, saw all the young people off, straining her eyes at the same time to see who were "chiming" up to each other.

"Taake care of the maidens," she called after the young men, "gooen' arver they greüt ugly stiles," and so with many "good-nights" they all left Squellers, and this first Christmas party of the Ollivers had at last come to an end.

*How they Spent Christ-
mas Eve at St. Cadge*

CHAPTER ONE.

ST. CADGE COVE nestled between two bold headlands, which afforded some shelter from the east and west winds. A rough, shingly beach, with large boulders cropping up here and there, made landing somewhat difficult at times for the crabbers who sold their shellfish to the "smacks" which called weekly and then sailed away with their purchases to some seaport towns.

The village itself lay at the back of the Cove in a hollow between sloping fields and orchards. A few cottages, however, were perched on a high part of the cliff and looked down on the beach. A quiet, out-of-the-way spot was St. Cadge in those days. A tourist was rarely seen, its natural beauties being little known. Yet there were grand freaks of nature within a short distance, one being a wonderful cave, into which in stormy weather the waves rushed furiously, tossing and foaming in awful grandeur; and then again during calm days and nights all was still and placid,

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It was then perfectly safe for a boat to penetrate till it became almost dark, and still the end of this weird and gloomy cave had not been reached.

We sang *Rock of Ages* there once while sitting in a crabber's boat, and the effect cannot be described ; the echo tossing the melody from side to side. We were all filled with awe. The dim light, the water around us looking so black, and the rocky roof scarcely discernible in the gloom, sent a shudder through us all ; and it was with a sense of relief that we found ourselves once more in the light at the mouth of the cave, one of the party at least inwardly vowing that she would never go through another such experience.

Near the Cove, too, there was a natural amphitheatre formed by the subsiding of the cliff through the action of the waves, an object of wonder to thousands of tourists during the last thirty years.

Our story, however, has to do with homely village folk, so we must curtail our description of nature's beauties. Clean and trim the cottages looked as you descended to St. Cadge, for everyone believed in whitewashing, and the good housewives vied with each other as

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to whose home should look the cleanest. The east and north winds being cut off, geraniums and fuchsias lived out of doors through the winter, the latter often reaching the top of the kitchen windows.

There was the Inn, too, most properly managed and respectably kept. There were few habitual drunkards : in fact but one who belonged really and truly to that unhappy class ; but of him, more anon.

Christmas was near. Everyone was counting the days, and every cottage was white-washed and thoroughly cleaned. Many a pig was slain in order that his loins and spareribs might grace the Christmas dinner-table, and many were the dying screeches heard in various yards during these busy days. Geese and fowls too were dispatched and got ready for roasting, and making into pies.

So Christmas Eve came round once more. The saffron buns and cake were made, and everyone looked bright and smiling.

Mr. James Collins, who kept the "White Goose," was a man highly respected. His wife, too, was held in great esteem, and was spoken of as a motherly sort of woman, and a kind friend to the poor.

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They had two grown-up daughters who possessed powerful voices ; in fact, they and their brothers could beat every one for miles around in singing carols. Mary Jane sang soprano and Sarah Ann alto. Jimmy came in with a deep bass ; George and William usually sang tenor ; while little Joe sometimes took one part, sometimes another, just as the fancy seized him.

To hear the Collinses sing was a treat indeed, though none of them had ever taken a lesson ; and to none more than to their uncle, William Collins. He was a bachelor, but there was a whisper that when young he had admired a lady far above him socially, and that when she married and his hopes were shattered (though she knew nothing of them) he had never looked at womankind in that way again.

The old man lived alone and "did" for himself ; and his two rooms were a credit to him. He was very fond of his nieces, especially liking to hear them sing. So on this Christmas Eve he called, asking them to come over and have some "eggy hot" with him, the usual drink at that season.

"Iss, uncle," said Mary Jane, quite pleased

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with the prospect; "we'll come arver an' maake the eggy hot, an' sing to 'a bit afterwards."

"No, no," he replied quickly. "I'll git'n all ready 'gen you come. *I* can maake eggy hot s'well as any womon *I* know, you see ef *I* caan't."

At eight o'clock the two girls stepped across the village to their uncle's little cottage. There was no blind to the kitchen window, so they peeped in to see how the preparations were going on. There sat the old man at the table with a quart basin before him, eating something out of it with a spoon. Wondering to see him taking broth on such an evening, they watched him with much curiosity, and soon discovered that it was the eggy hot he was devouring with all haste. They could plainly see the great lumps of egg in the spoon as he raised it to his mouth.

"Poor uncle," cried Mary Jane, convulsed with laughter. "Why, aw ben maakin' the eggy hot, an' aw dedn't know how to thraw et foorth an' back, an' the eggs es all gone in great lumps."

"Sarve 'm right," said Sarah Ann, decisively.

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"I wanted for 'n to lev es maake et, but aw do alles think aw can do so well as any womon. Hallo, uncle!" she cried, bursting into the room, "what are 'a eaten' of 'on?"

"Why, I was 'aven' a bit of somefen' 'fore you come. Now, my dears, lev es be gone an' maake the eggy hot far our lives."

The girls had not the heart to let out the secret. All three set to work, and soon a large brown jug was filled with the smoking beverage. And they sat around the Christmas logs in the old open chimney, and the girls sang the old-fashioned carols, much to uncle's delight. Evidently he was not grieving over the loss of the beer, eggs, and sugar that had turned out such a miserable failure.

"Now," said Mary Jane, after they had sung several carols, "lev es be gone hoome, 'cause our people will be wanten' some singen' too."

Uncle came out with them, closing the door behind him—no need for locking up in St. Cadge! At William Gendall's door stood Jinny his wife, looking eagerly up the road. They could see her distinctly in the moonlight.

"Who are 'a looken' far 'on, Jinny?" asked one of them.

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"Why, Willyom, chul," she replied sadly, "aw ben gone up Tresodder far hours, sein' far drop cider, an' ed'n come yet. What aw man aw es! Noberry knaw what *I* got to put up weth." Her face was naturally a long one, but now it was stretched lengthways to the very utmost.

"I'm fine an' sorry for 'a, Jinny," said Mary Jane, sympathetically. "What aw mis'roble man he es!"

"Aw! no, no," she replied, seeming rather "niffed;" "I caant say es *that*. Never aw better 'usbunt lived when he's sober, an' as good a workman as ever took tool in hand."

"Come along," whispered Sarah Ann. "You can see," she continued, when they were out of hearing, "that she caan't abide far anybody to say a word agen 'om. I heard faather say that one time Philly Trebilcock was screechen' murder far 'ar very life, an' when he runned up, theree was Rechey pounden' way 'pon 'ar an' knocken' 'ar about, an' faather cried out, 'Why, lev the womon aloone; why, wha's matter weth 'a, you're killen' 'ar;' an' ef she ded'n tell faather to go 'bout his bisness—that he wasn't wanted theree."

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"Aw iss," remarked uncle, "wemmen es very contrary—never know how to taake them."

"'Tis aw true ol' sayen' that

" 'When two married folks are flouten'
An' a stranger pokes es snout in
He es sure to git aw tweak far es pains.' "

They had reached the Inn now, and all the family joined in singing carols till they were hoarse. How they rolled out the choruses, doubling over the words, trilling and shaking, taking solos, and then all joining in with such a tremendous burst of sound, that at last Mrs. Collins held up her hand, and begged them to sing softer, for she said her head was ready to "bust!"

They had few listeners on a Christmas Eve, for nearly everyone kept to his own house and sang carols; so that from all parts of the village melodies soft or loud resounded.

The Collinses were singing the last carol when the maid came into the room, and whispered to her mistress, who turned to her husband and said a few words. The young people, observing all this, were longing to know what was going on. Scarcely had the

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last note died away when Mary Jane asked eagerly,

“Wha’s the matter ’on, mawther?”

“Why the Christmas plays es out there; want to come in bit.”

“Aw, mother,” cried all the children together, “lev thom come in, iss mawther do.”

“But they’ll kick up such a ranty-mis-skit” (uproar), said she.

“Never mind for wance,” replied her husband, “the rooüds es dry as boones, so they waan’t dirty the floor.”

“Well thon,” said his wife, “tell thom to come in,” and Cherry disappeared, delighted to carry out the command.

After some shuffling outside the door in walks a masked figure with a nose!—out of all proportion to the rest of his face. This striking personage is attired in a black coat, gaily adorned with bits of red cloth sewn here and there. Short pieces of straw threaded like beads, intermixed with tiny circles of red cloth, hang from different parts of his body. His head is adorned with an immense paper hat in the gayest of colours, with cock’s feathers stuck in to add to the effect. After making a few turns up and

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down the room, in a feigned voice he introduces himself as follows :—

“ Here come I, old Father Christmas,
Welcome or welcome not,
I hope old Father Christmas
Will never be forgot.
With a head like a pig
And a body like a sow
And a great long nose
Like the beam of a plough.”

This speech being finished, two more figures, also gaily dressed and masked, enter. All talk together, till the new-comers quarrel and commence to fight with swords (blunt ones of course). The skirmish comes to a sudden end by one of them falling on the floor. The conqueror looks around and asks in a tone of distress—

“ Es other doctor to be found,
To cure this deep and deadly wound ?”

“ wound ” rhyming with “ found.” In an instant he who personates the doctor, and who has been waiting outside, springs in holding a black bottle, but, instead of going to his patient at once, he gives to the audience

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an account of the various ills he professes to cure, and all the while the figure on the floor lies stretched at full length without any sign of life. Then stooping over him the doctor puts the bottle to his lips and shouts,

“Rise, and fight King George again.”

Up jumps the wounded man, suddenly cured, and he and his former enemy go at it once more. But after a while the fighting turns to dancing, turning, jumping, and other movements in which join Father Christmas, doctor, and other figures in masks. At last a hat is passed round, the Collinses feel in their pockets, and out come pence, which are willingly given, all being delighted with the performance.

Mrs. Collins brings in some saffron cake, which the poor creatures cannot eat because of their masks ; so they take it away with them. The family then begin to guess who the performers are—some having rather betrayed themselves by not carefully feigning their voices.

Mr. Collins and his brother have thoroughly enjoyed it all. They have been accustomed every Christmas since their boyhood to see

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the old play acted. For several nights this is repeated in the neighbouring farmhouses and cottages, till by the time the festive season is over, the pence which the performers have collected amount to quite a respectable sum.

CHAPTER TWO.

WILLIAM GENDALL, so they said, could no more be spared from St. Cadge than the parson or the grave-digger. William's real trade was that of a mason, but there were few kinds of work that he could not undertake. A handy man was William ; moreover he was obliging, respectful, honest in his dealings, and good-behaved except when he was not himself. But—ah ! that but !—he “dearly loved the drop.” Not that he got drunk every day, but placed in temptation's way he always fell.

Jinny, his wife, was a Christian woman, and this trial was the bitter drop in her cup ; but with Some One to lean on, she bore up bravely on the whole. She never paraded her husband's failings, rarely allowing herself even to speak at all of his besetment.

However William might neglect the means of grace, Jinny and the children were regularly at the house of God. She was doing her best to bring up her little ones

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respectably ; but it was a hard struggle, for when William had his "bouts" the money quickly wasted away. The villagers pitied Jinny, but they had little hope of her husband ever abandoning his habits.

On this Christmas Eve he "changed himself" after the early dinner, fully intending to spend the evening with his family.

"Now, Jinny," said he, in a pleasant tone, "I shall run up Tresodder fur drop cider ; sure to git it good up theere." Besides he knew there would only be a trifle to pay, as cider was plentiful in most farmhouses in those days. So William took a gallon jar, and putting a rope through the handle, slung it over his shoulder and set out.

"Doont 'a stop, Willyom," called his wife after him in a coaxing voice. She knew there was the risk which attended his going.

"*I* stop," he answered back cheerfully. "No, no, Jinny, *I* shaan't stop, never fear. I shall be back agen in a crack, you *see* ef I ar'n't."

"Aw !" she thought, "ef I cud but depend 'pon 'om, how putty et wud be."

As we have seen, hours passed. Night settled in. But no William came. The

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children were all in bed, eleven o'clock had struck, and still Jinny watched and waited. It was a sad, lonely Christmas Eve for her, and tears were in her eyes as she contrasted her lot with that of so many of her neighbours, who she knew had been sitting round the fire with their wives and children, singing carols, and spending a happy evening ; and a feeling of neglect and loneliness stole over her. It soon passed though, and the blessed reality of her friendship with God rose above everything else. "Lord," she sobbed out, "Thou knowest all things, how I am tried and cast down. Thou knowest that I love Thee." The feeling of loneliness was gone, Christ seemed near her as a real presence.

The village was now quiet, and all lights out. Jinny had no fears for her husband's safety, but putting a shawl over her head she thought of going up the road to meet him.

Before proceeding many yards she heard footsteps approaching, and listened. "Iss," she said, "'tes Willyom, sure enough, I knaw 'om by his staps," so she walked back quickly to wait for him in the doorway.

Up he came, walking very doubtfully.

"Why, where's the jar, Willyom?" she

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asked mildly as he was passing into the kitchen.

He put his hand behind him and felt up and down his back, staring at her with great vacant eyes. "Why, whatever es become ob'n?" he asked still staring, and then it all seemed to come back to him, and he stammered out, "Aw! I knaw now, why 'tes they ol' mis'roble rough rooüds—an' I full down—an' scat the ol' jar in rags."

Jinny said nothing. What use was it talking to a tipsy man?

Next morning when the villagers were going up to church, everyone came to a standstill at a certain spot; for there was a big wet place in the road; the body of the jar lay on one side of it, and the neck and handle with the rope still through it on the other. So the secret came out, for many had seen William pass through the village with the jar on his back, and the bit of gossip went the round of St. Cadge.

Although the rest of William Gendall's simple history has no particular connexion with Christmas, it made so deep an impression on St. Cadge that perhaps it may be narrated here.

Jinny was failing, as everyone but her hus-

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band could see, but she rarely complained, and none knew how she suffered. The neighbours looked on her as an ill-used woman and could not understand her taking so meekly her husband's neglect.

"He ar *I* shud 'ave ben in our graaves 'fore this time ef he was *my* 'usbunt," said Eleanor Bolitho, a woman who stood six feet in her shoes, and was a veritable Amazon. "Do 'a think *I* wud put up weth such a greüt lavarock? Not sure 'nough."

"Aw iss, he's an anointed wan, Eleanor," cried Polly Allen, "but after all we wemmen shud find'n wanten' ef aw was gone. Who would do our lill' mason's jobs, an' put in our lill' graates an things like Willyom? No, no. *I* doon want far'n to *die*, but 'tes thousand pities he's so fullish."

Jinny Gendall believed in the power of prayer, and though her faith was severely tried, she had a strong assurance that her husband would be saved. The answer was coming sooner than the good woman thought. William, returning home one night rather the worse for liquor, found his wife lying on the kitchen floor. He called out, but there was no answer. Going up close to her, he again

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called, in some alarm, "Jinny, Jinny!" Still there was no response. He raised her up—the face was pale, the eyes closed. Tremblingly he carried her upstairs, laid her on the bed and rushed out of the house like a wild man, to call a neighbour.

When he returned out of breath and as sober as ever he was in his life, there lay his wife in the same position. The five minutes that intervened between his arrival and Kitty's were enough to work a mighty change in this hardened man.

His life rose up before him like a great mountain, and he saw himself a sinner. He had moreover an impression that this was his wife's death-bed. Taking her wasted hand in his he bathed it with tears—tears of deep repentance too. Jinny's prayers were answered; and the stricken man fell on his knees by the bedside.

When Kitty entered she was almost stunned. William was loudly sobbing, "Oh, Lord, 'ave marcy 'pon me, saave me, the worst of sinners." Then turning again to his wife he wailed piteously, "Jinny, speak to yer good-far-nawthen' 'usbunt. Oh! I'v killed 'a by my wicked ways."

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Kitty saw at a glance that the poor woman had had a seizure. A neighbour hurried for the doctor who lived ten miles away, but William never left the bedside of his dying wife, and there in the face of a great and awful loss he truly repented and was mercifully forgiven.

The joy of pardon was his, but it was tempered by deep sorrow for her who was slipping away from him and bitter remorse for the past. No doctor could save Jinny now, and she never spoke again. A few hours after, Jinny had gone to a land where neither loneliness nor neglect is ever known. From this time William was the most devoted Christian in St. Cadge. Neither old companions nor favourite haunts had any more attraction for him. Everything intoxicating he avoided as he would a serpent. He never regained his old cheerfulness, nor was he ever known to indulge in any frivolous conversation.

A great sorrow indeed had fallen on him, and a sad thoughtful look gradually settled on his face.

When some out of kindness tried to rally him on his sober manner and to rouse him,

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William would shake his head and often quote—

“No room for mirth or trifling here,
For worldly hope or worldly fear
If life so soon is gone !”

There is a quiet, beautifully kept church-yard, shaded by trees, only a short distance from St. Cadge, where some years ago they, amid many expressions of grief, laid an old man to rest. It was the mason of St. Cadge.

CHAPTER THREE.

THE Christmas morning service was always looked forward to on account of the special anthem and Christmas carols. Parson Sterling was getting into years, and it was a great relief when he could sit down, and for five or ten minutes give the service into the hands of Tom Tobbett, the leader of the choir.

The "singing seat" in those days was directly under the reading desk. The musicians were Jerry Johns, with his bass viol, and sitting next to him brother Henry, who was deaf, with his flageolet. Brother Benny sat on the other side of Jerry with a clarionet, and Peter Permewan with his great bassoon always occupied the corner. The singers filled up the remaining places.

Up jumps Tom Tobbett to do his part. "Now," he says looking round the church, "we're gooen to 'ave the ol' Christmas h'em. Now *sing* all of 'a—*sing*, an' they that caan't sing must 'toadley'" (make some sort of a sound).

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Then in a high, drawling, nasal tone he gives out the first two lines,

“ While shep’ards watch theer flocks by night,
All seüted on the grou-ou-ound,”

running down the scale in the last three syllables to give the correct starting note. Off they go. Bassoon, flageolet, clarionet, and bass viol. Benny the deaf man leans towards Jerry in the second line and shouts out, “ Am I playen’ right ? ” Jerry, all intent on his bass viol, is so annoyed that he gives Benny a whack across the arm with the bow and a sharp and loud “ Go on weth ’a.” Oh ! the squeaks, thunder, discord, bad time, puffing in and out of mouths, and the shrill untrained voices of the singers ! But what a performance to the humble worshippers !

“ Grand esn’t et, Uncle Toby,” whispers one aged man to another, with eyes fixed on the struggling musicians.

“ Aw iss, Caleb, ’tes like ’eaven ’pon earth come down.”

Benny’s face is the colour of a boiled lobster, and his eyes are like two bull’s-eye sweets on Matty Edwards’s “ stanen ” at Stonley.

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Just before the sermon they have the grand Christmas anthem, in which Henry plays a clarionet solo, followed by a full chorus. When the performance is ended, the hot musicians, looking round the church, smile and nod to their friends, as much as to say, "There now, what do 'a think of that?"

Hannah Cock and Molly James were rarely absent from church. Neither of them could read, but they joined in the responses, especially in the Litany when it came to "We beseech Thee to hear us, good Lord."

Molly used to say that her eyelids would never keep up while the parson was reading his sermon. Reading, she said, always sent her off to sleep like a top; but she believed the Lord know'd all about it, and was sure He wouldn't be hard 'pon her for an infirmity.

During the service Hannah had been "burnen' inside," for she had a bit of news for her old friend Molly.

"What do 'a think, Molly?" asked Hannah, in a "Tom Hollow's whisper" as soon as they got out of the porch. "Maester George Jenkin es thinken' 'bout mar-ren' agen."

"Never! to be sure, Hannah; why, aw hab'n got aw tooth in es 'ead."

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"My dear chield, ded'n 'a hear et 'on? Why, aw ben away seein' aw man 'bout 'aven' some false wans, chul."

"False teeth! Why, tes dreadful to think about, Hannah, gooen' 'bout weth dead people's teeth in yer mouth, auh!"

"Well, Molly, they say he's after aw womon 'way arver to Stoonley somewheere, an' that she's come into braa bit aw money lately, an' ef he can catch *she* he'll weer false teeth ar anything else to maake hissself look spruce, the ol' whipper-snapper; an' aw got aw new cooût, an' aw blaw'd up our Tilly sky high yes'day 'cause she dedn't maake es collars stiffer. So you may be sure theere's somefen in it."

"Aw, iss, iss, Hannah, you may be sure he's 'coorten' ef he's gitten' pe'ticler 'bout es collars an' things. Well, he's aw fullish ol' man, an' gitten' up in 'ears too.'

The two women now parted roads, each busy in thought over their bit of gossip.

Mr. George Jenkin, the subject of their talk, was nearly seventy, and a man who had seen better days. He "looked high," having descended from one of the best families in the neighbourhood.

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Miss Rosina Tyack's tender point was "family." She often said she would rather never marry than get into a low family. "I'm not like a young and foolish girl. I like to know who I'm going to be mixed up with, and who my relations will be."

Mr. Jenkin's teeth were finished, but did not fit. They were altered, and forwarded in a neat little box. The excited man fitted them in, but they gave him great pain. Was there not a rumour, however, that another lover, attracted like himself, perhaps, by the recent fortune, was hovering round Miss Rosina? Pain or no pain he would ride over, and bring matters to a crisis for weal or woe. He felt himself looking twenty years younger, and Miss Rosina, he was certain, would scarcely take him for more than fifty. Though they had never been introduced, he had often seen her at Stonley market, and he felt he could live very contentedly with her. It was simply owing to the delay with the teeth that matters had not been already settled one way or another; but while he awaited them he had thrown out hints to a friend or two not noted for still tongues, and in a small village it is the easiest

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thing in the world to set a bit of gossip rolling.

"Well, 'tis wonderful how things do turn up," said Miss Rosina softly, as she furtively watched the happy candidate out of sight. "Just the family I should like to get into—a nice, sober man, and not at all bad-looking. As for his teeth, one would think they were false, so white and regular, too; but Mr. Jenkin, we know, would never be so vain as to wear false teeth. I do like to see a man with a good set of teeth!"

From this it will be seen that in Cornwall fifty years ago the wearing of artificial teeth was attributed to vanity, and never to a desire to help mastication and digestion. And if any reader grumbles that we have wandered, in the latter part of this chapter, too far from the church porch, and asks what teeth have to do with Christmas, he must inquire of the first little boy he meets how we should dispatch the Christmas goose without them.

CHAPTER FOUR.

EVERY village in Cornwall had its own particular ghosts, and St. Cadge was no exception to the rule, its ghost appearing, as was meet and right, one Christmas Eve. But we must go back a few years in order to make things plain.

Billy Bottrell and Betty Coade were a quiet-going pair during their courtship. Betty, who lived in farm service, always said that once a week, namely, Sunday, was often enough for any decent young woman to see her "shiner;" and no mistress, we may be sure, would dispute that matter with her. Folks said that Billy was not very bright, and that Betty, fairly good-looking and a capital servant, might do better; but she was pleased with her choice, and that settled it.

Christmas Eve, the day before the wedding, had arrived, and Billy in great glee clapped his hands, grinned, and leaped about like one demented. "Ah!" he exclaimed exultingly to some friends, "I'm Billy Bottrell to-day,

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I shall be William Coade to-morrow." His brain was in a whirl, and he had somehow mixed things up.

Billy and Betty began housekeeping in a long, low, thatched building containing only one large room. There was a lovely view of St. Cadge cove and cliffs from the cottage, though doubtless the inmates thought little of that.

The surplus vegetables from their large garden partly provided a pig, which they would feed up for killing. Billy's idea of feeding a pig was a novel one, for it had a feast one day, and a fast the next, so as to make streaky pork, as he used to say.

Time went on till the cottage swarmed with children. Betty had decent ideas, and she worried over so many sleeping in one room that served for every purpose. She soon conceived a plan, bought a few laths and some thin lengths of wood, and then with her own hands fixed up two or three partitions to form cubicles. These partitions she covered with newspapers, begged from the respectable farmers for miles around, for in those days papers were scarce, costing fourpence halfpenny and even sixpence each.

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After great exertions she managed to secure a little privacy for the elder children, though her achievement only consisted of a very frail structure; so that one morning, when there was a strong southerly wind blowing directly against Betty's door, and Mr. Collins, wishing to speak to Billy, lifted the latch and opened it, a blast swept through the interior, and the papered partitions rattled and quivered like aspen-leaves.

"Aw! my dear saul!" cried Betty in great alarm; "shut the doer, quick—shut'n, ar my screens will be down all of a heap."

Billy's wages were small, but the large family managed somehow to get along on them, supplemented occasionally by a little smuggling job.

In course of time the elder boys went into farm service and times grew somewhat better.

One Christmas Eve just seventeen years after Billy's wedding, Jackman the eldest boy came home very ill; and Billy thinking him in danger rode off on a borrowed horse for the doctor, who prescribed, gave Betty her orders and left.

Mother and father had passed an exciting day, and as the boy now quietly slept, they

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left him in charge of his eldest sister, and hurried down to the "White Goose" to have a little drop before the house was closed.

Young Collins, and his friend Joe Bennett, always ready for any fun, listened while the story of Jackman's sudden illness was related for the good of every one in the kitchen, and then the two young men slipped out. Their plans were soon formed, and both creeping under an old hedge, that near the ground had been dug out, they waited in a crouching position, their backs to the road, and each with a white garment drawn over the extremity nearest to any passer-by. In a few minutes they heard footsteps coming up the hill.

"Wha's that, Betty, up theere in the 'edge?" asked Billy, tremblingly.

"Wheere, Billy?"

"Why, up theere—look."

"Law, whatever es et? Why 'tes aw tooken, Billy, Jackman 'll die, I knaw aw will. They're ghoostes."

"No, no, Betty," he replied reassuringly, though himself trembling with fear, "they're two white pigs," and he approached cautiously, feeling before him with his stick, but still

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keeping at some distance. "Aw hooay—aw hooay," he cried out to the pigs.

The young men, after allowing him to call and beat his stick on the ground for a minute or two, without in the least altering the position of their bodies, hopped out of the hedge, and to the horror of the frightened couple hopped away down the hill. And such ghostly sights they looked in the partial darkness that Betty in great distress cried out :

"Aw, Billy, my dear boy'll die. Iss aw will, thus aw tooken chul tha's what that es."

They were riveted to the spot with fear. Meanwhile the merry youths were no sooner out of sight, than, scampering through the village, they climbed some hedges, ran up the fields, and planted themselves, white backs outwards, near a path along which the couple had to pass to get to their cottage.

At last, partially recovered from their terrible fright, Billy and Betty came slowly up the hill, talking quietly and solemnly. They got over the stile, and there, before them, was the strange vision once more !

"Oh ! my goodness guide me, Billy, what shall es do ? there's the ghoostes agen. Oh ! wheere shall I go ? Lem me shut my eyes.

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Oh! Billy, catch hawld of me—Oh! Now we do know 'tes two ghoostes, 'cause they was down bottom of the hill jest now, an' now they're up 'long here."

The ghosts once more went hop, hop, down the field, when the horrified couple rushed wildly one after the other, Betty screaming at the top of her voice, and on reaching the cottage, forgetting Jackman, she beat wildly on the door, arousing the poor boy from his peaceful sleep; and then she sank down on the floor and almost fainted away.

The tale of the two ghosts seen on Christmas Eve went the round of St. Cadge and its neighbourhood, and was told, not always without exaggeration of its horrors, to many a shuddering circle round the Christmas fire when the carol-singing was over: but the ghosts themselves laughed in their sleeves, and kept their secret for years.

CHAPTER FIVE.

THE Christmas Eve that stands out before all others, and is even now referred to with emotion by the very oldest inhabitant of St. Cadge, was that on which a great sorrow fell on the entire neighbourhood.

It was between two and three in the afternoon, and there was an ugly ground swell in the Cove.

Two crabbers—brothers, who had gone to Rackover to fetch a boatload of withs for making their crabpots—now made for the Cove in their small heavily-laden boat. They were men much respected, especially the elder brother, who was a sincere Christian and whose consistent life and kindly disposition had endeared him to his neighbours.

There were many speculations among those on shore as to the risk of landing with such a sea, but none seemed to think it necessary to warn them by signs not to approach. On came the boat, and cautiously the two men watched their opportunity to run her in between one wave and another.

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The beach was lined with anxious watchers, among them the son and two daughters of the elder brother ; all of them excited, but not realising the awful risk to which the two men were exposed. After keeping the boat tolerably stationary for some minutes, and then taking advantage of a temporary lull, they exerted all their strength, and pulled vigorously for the shore.

Alas ! the task was too great. A huge wave behind curled over, entirely swamping the boat. Everyone stood panic-stricken and riveted to the spot. Then the three children rushed wildly up and down ; Mattie, her father's pet, falling heavily into some woman's arms. Both men were seen to rise, striking the waves vigorously at first with their hands ; but neither of them could swim. Presently the hands moved more feebly, and then altogether disappeared.

Meanwhile a young and courageous fisherman had hurriedly launched a boat, which was put off, and the bodies were quickly picked up.

All that could possibly be done to restore life was resorted to, but the improved methods of inducing respiration, little enough under-

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stood by a crowd even in our own day, were then scarcely known or practised at all, and the unfortunate men finally succumbed.

Mattie recovered consciousness just as they were engaged in rescuing the drowning men. As soon as they were brought ashore, she sank down by the body of her father, fixing her eyes intently on his face, and watching for the least sign of returning life. Mattie was bound up in her father: for her mother dying when she was quite a child, her love had been lavished on her remaining parent. "She is like the apple of my eye," he used to say; and to a busybody who asked him one day why he did not marry again, he replied somewhat severely, "No, I'll never have any woman to come between me and my little Mattie." Her sister too and brother overcome with grief were tremblingly watching the fruitless efforts of the rescuers.

"'Tis all arver, I b'lieve," incautiously whispered one man to another. Mattie, who had been suppressing her feelings with a great effort up till now, overheard the remark:

"What! my faather gone?" she asked, and fell on his body in an agony of grief. "Lem me die weth'n" he cried. "My dear, dear

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faather. Lem me go to he and mawther.' You dear, good faather." She was fervently kissing his lips, but no sign of life followed. The other sister and brother hung over their father, bitterly crying. It was a pitiful sight. Rough men standing around were freely giving way to grief.

The afternoon was closing in, but still the three orphans hung over the corpse.

"We must git the poor little sauls away," said a fisherman; "'twill be dark soon now."

"Come, come," said an old woman coaxingly, "doon't a' give way so. Why ted'n as ef yer faather wasn't fit to go. He, dear creatur', es spenden' his Christmas Eve with the Lord."

"Come in weth me, an' ave some tay. Come, Mattie dear," said Gracie, gently lifting up her sister's head. She quietly obeyed. Then turning her woe-begone face towards the cove, she shuddered, murmuring sadly as if to herself, "Dear faather, lost, and nearly home!"

This might seem too sad an ending for our little book; but no doubt it will be read by some to whom Yule-tide will come laden with new sorrow or with memories of old

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loss, as well as by the festive and light-hearted. Upon such mourners the merry-makings of others will perhaps jar, and they may find it hard to restrain murmurous envy of happier friends. Possibly it will help them to learn that they are not after all outcasts of Fortune, and most tried of human kind, if they are reminded that it was thus they sometimes spent Christmas at St. Cadge, and that Mrs. Olliver's tea-party, and pawns, and cakes, and mummers, and carols were only one side of Christmas in Cornwall sixty years ago.

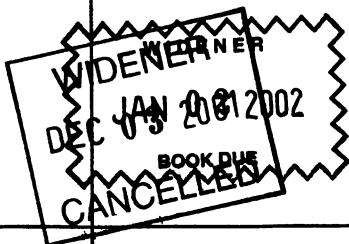
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